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NOAA SATELLITES, EMERGENCY BEACON SAVE LIVES OFF FLORIDA COAST

September 22, 2004 – Two fishermen were rescued from their sinking boat 20 miles off the coast of St. Petersburg, Fla., Sunday thanks to an emergency beacon that sent a distress signal detected by NOAA satellites.

At 4:30 a.m. Sunday, the two men awoke to the sound of water entering their vessel. Minutes later, NOAA satellites detected and relayed a distress signal from the boat's Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon, or EPIRB, to the agency's Mission Control Center in Suitland, Md. The center verified the signal, pinpointed the location of the fishermen's 32-foot boat, The Angler Management, and notified the U.S. Coast Guard.

An HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter was then sent from Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, Fla., which hoisted the two men from their life raft and transported them to shore. Both men were listed in good condition.

"This rescue highlights the need for all boats to have an EPIRB. In this case, the radio onboard the vessel was not working and they had no other means to call for help," said Lt. Daniel Karlson, of NOAA SARSAT. "It was their EPIRB that ultimately helped save them."

The international Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking System (COSPAS-SARSAT) is the program responsible for the rescue, and others like it. Since SARSAT became operational in 1982, more than 17,000 lives have been saved worldwide, including nearly 5,000 in the United States.

"Anyone who sails a boat should have an EPIRB and register it with NOAA," Karlson added. "It could be the difference between life and death."

EPIRB owners, and users of other emergency beacons, can register their units online at: www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov

NOAA Satellites and Information is the nation's primary source of space-based meteorological and climate data. It operates the nation's environmental satellites, which are used for weather and ocean observation and forecasting and climate monitoring.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources. NOAA is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

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